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EXTENSION ALTERNATIVES IN DEALING WITH EDUCATIONAL POLICY ISSUES

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In our discussion so far we have attempted to relate the importance of education to economic growth, particularly in providing maximum opportunities for our labor force to adjust continuously to changing needs and conditions brought about by growth. We have emphasized the importance of education in helping to bring about the desired adjustments in agriculture, and possibly the most important is our concern in providing rural youth with the maximum opportunity for employment.

We have attempted to outline some of the alternative policies for providing education to meet current needs with particular emphasis on our organization and financing of public schools, grades one through twelve.

Now we would like to briefly explore our role as extension workers and particularly some of the alternatives we can or have used in dealing with these educational problems. The program committee has included the subject on the agenda, thus indicating that it is an area of concern to public affairs workers. Therefore, the question is not so much whether we do it but how we do it.

Our alternatives include the one extreme of doing nothing. The other extreme is assuming direct leadership in the reorganization or redirection and expansion of our educational system. A third alternative is engaging in various degrees of activities between these two extremes.

Naturally, what is done and how it is done will vary from state to state. A number of factors will influence these decisions, including the following:

1. The adequacy of the present educational program in the state and communities.
2. The attitude of local people and local and state school officials with regard to the problem of education.
3. The working relationship between extension workers and those in the school system, including the departments of education.
4. Extension resources available for work in this field—the interest, training, or competence of personnel to work in this area.

5. The priority given this particular work by extension administration based on valuation of the total needs and resources available.

The job does not have to be done in any one way. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Use discussion material, such as those in the self-administered discussion program at Cornell.
2. Include career guidance as a part of our 4-H and other youth programs.
3. Cooperate with our high schools and colleges in providing career guidance or career exploration activities.
4. Cooperate with departments of education in workshops, community and county forums, or other similar means of involving local leadership and appraising the needs, resources available, alternatives, opportunities for providing maximum educational opportunities for the youth, and the necessary action to implement the desired alternatives.
5. Arrange for public examination and discussion of the structural imbalance and quality of offerings of school districts through the Rural Areas Development program.
6. Cooperate with other groups and agencies interested in programs of this nature.